

2.10.2002

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Inquiring Minds and Inquiry Frames ¹

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“While we cannot live without our past, we need not live within it either”

Amartya Sen (1996, p.38)

The study of knowledge (epistemology) and the study of value (axiology) are central to the purpose of life, everyday living, and affect everyone. Yet, the relationship of knowledge to its value remains controversial. The question whether social sciences, indigenous to the West, comprising articulable knowledge as its main component, can be universal for all is of profound significance. Its corollary whether knowledge derived from experiences outside the West, a large part of which comprises tacit knowledge and oral traditional knowledge is generalisable with or without first being codified is of even greater significance. The greater part of the world's stock of what is knowable is not reducible as information. Both questions have disturbing implications for all inquiring minds and every inquiry frame. In a previous study, ‘What Knowledge is of Most Worth ? ‘ (Mathur, 2000), I analysed the power dynamics between global and local spaces as differences of pictures-in-the-mind that influence educators when they face dilemmas over the design of educational curricula. Viewing differences in the broader context of global convergence, once we recognise

¹ In Partha Nath Mukherjee and Chandan Sengupta (eds.), ‘Social Science in South Asia:Indigeneity and Universality’, 2002 (forthcoming).

that praxis and concept would relate to one another even in the absence of “scholars” and knowledge creation is not a monopoly enterprise, sources and authorities for different scholarly traditions and the assumptions underlying them need to be explicitly introduced in examining these. This paper focuses on how inquiring minds work through inquiry frames with due regard to the constraints of boundary conditions within which they function. Within this general inquiry, I have chosen to focus on Nepal, rich in local knowledge and natural resources and so poorly endowed with financial resources and with such limited capacity to absorb universal remedies that Nepal is unable to spend about half of the dose of foreign aid it receives annually from donor countries and agencies.

Let me introduce the problematique with an anecdote . In 1985, the joint-venture affiliate of a multinational firm in the food and beverages sector launched a consumer product in Nepal labelling its product “*Naulo*” (which means, ‘new’ in Nepali) in a colourful red packet. The product inside was an identical replica of the largest selling brand of its category in neighbouring India, known by another name, which was already successfully made and marketed by the same multinational firm since the 1960s. The brand *Naulo* failed miserably in Nepal. I was invited to investigate this failure by the firm because I had recently left my executive position with that multinational firm to embark on my academic vocation and was familiar with the industry. Research into this failure pointed to two causes. Firstly, the attractiveness of anything “new” was not at that time reinforcable as a desired attribute among Nepali people who valued tradition, history and

culture. Secondly, the colour red, though popular in India², turned away consumers in neighbouring Nepal because somehow it subliminally reminded them of blood and animal sacrifices. *Naulo* was withdrawn from the market, amidst protests by Indian managers who privately complained to me that the Nepalis lacked taste. The extent to which perception shapes cognition and the limits of human cognition in perceptual fields are well demonstrated in examples of optical illusions. Cognitive dissonance which disables the Subject's objectivity or defines/distorts preferences is a distinct well-recognised behavioural phenomenon caused by uncopable mismatches between the Subject's thoughts and feelings that distort perception and cognition.

In Nepal, the Himalayas, viewed as eternal, are part of the pictures-in-the-mind from which metaphors and icons are primarily internalised in this culture. Quality is identified as being *Uchh Choti ka* (literally translatable as, 'of the top peak') The same identical product relaunched a year later as "*Shikhar*" (meaning Peak or Mountain Top) in a blue and white pack. became an instant success and remains the market leader in its category for over a decade. This "beauty lies in the eye of the beholder" phenomenon reveals much more than preferences regarding aesthetic appeal. It points to the significance of shared perspectives *commonly held together by groups* that are manifested in a multitude of ways. Unless all groups have identical experiences to conceptualise, even replicable phenomena or repeatedly

² Vermillion red is regarded auspicious in India. The colour was reinforced by the red of London's post-boxes, telephone booths, buses, and uniforms of Palace Guards-a colonial import into India. For Indian managers to generalise the aesthetic appeal of red to a neighbouring country without a prior survey shows how easily others can be assumed to be "like us" in matters of art, aesthetics, fashion. Tastes are often cultivated to be able to belong and be included among "like-minded" status sets.

observable phenomena such as the rising of the Sun or metal corrosion or photo-synthesis would lead to different ways of describing it, narrating it, understanding it and labelling the features or building blocks of that experience.

In his Abha Maity Memorial Lecture in Calcutta, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen argued *“that the present does not tell us much about who we are, how we can reasonably see ourselves and where we would place our loyalties if and when we face divisions. The self-perceptions that characterise a group are associated with, and to a great extent defined by, the shared memories and recollections of the past, and by the agreed priorities and implicit allegations that draw on those evocations”* (Sen , 1996).

Any inquiry to know something of an aspect of human experience is preceded by at least one inquiring mind. However, a single inquiring mind implies a minimum of two inquiry frames. When a Subject (*vishayi*) senses objects or phenomena (*vishaya*) outside of himself or herself, the same Subject (*vishayi*) or the Subject’s interlocutor has to be capable of relating perceptions and cognitions to knowledge traditions *commonly held together* with other Subjects. This duality is ever present at the core of whichever way plurality in human living is treated regardless of its standardisation, harmonisation, localisation or marginalisation. Some explicit assumptions about inquiry frames therefore need to be formulated at the outset of any discussion on indigeneity and generalisability.

The values placed on knowledge traditions may be located in their context by relating inquiring minds to inquiry frames. Inquiry frames are internalised

through at least two sets of overlapping experiences since human life involves birth, growth, gestation and mortality³. As an infant, through cathexis with significant others, an individual human takes first steps towards formation of personal identity. Although, a universal process this is specifically indigenous in content as evidenced by the variety in traditions of child rearing practices which constitute the principal determinant of how dependency, counter-dependency and inter-dependency are culturally transmitted across generations. Secondly, the design of inquiry frames in formal and non-formal education opens and limits the scope of individual observation and interpretation as part of socialisation processes. This second process supplements natural human endowments attributable to parenthood through the introduction of one or more competing formulations of knowledge about the world, personal skills required for human living and behavioural adaptation required to take up roles in response to needs, opportunities, resources and constraints.

There cannot be doubt that in the second process cited above, knowledge of the West created and acquired in or from the West is a valuable addition to ways of knowing and doing anywhere. However, the chronological precedence of economic development that occurred first in the West, and then elsewhere due to historical factors, caused Western expertise from the West to inform the rest from 1760 onwards. This led to seeking privilege on the premise that all phenomena of the world is objectively knowable through inquiry frames of the West, only through such frames and further, that the knowledge so obtained is universal (Havel, 1992). This disengaged stance frees the inquirer from placing himself or herself also inside the inquiry

³ *In this sense life may be universally caricatured as a fatal disease condition that is sexually transmitted.*

frame and is against the essence of relativity in the physical sciences, ignores evolution in the biological sciences and makes no allowance for the impossibility of controlled experiments in the social and economic sciences.

The problem of separating truth from reality is a complex one and could lie beyond one or the other, the many, and the void. Any alternative to the subject-object dichotomy raised above ought to revisit the man and nature paradigm and be prepared to relax the inquiry frames, even to do without them using self as an instrument, and also to let a diversity of people create and verify similar inquiry frames. However, this has been rendered impossible because the catalysts of change have primacy over the objects of change and the instrumental stance of reason causes all resources to be viewed as exploitable assets under the authority of production systems and owners of production systems. This has commoditised human resource too, and with it, human capacities to think, feel and act-essential to any inquiring mind (Mathur,1987a; Mathur 1987b). Guha (1989) argues that this mind-set was reinforced by colonisers because colonisation required ways of knowing and doing (relevant for the colonisers) to be declared as universally valid ⁴. I would add that decolonisation late in the twentieth century followed by globalisation in the first decade of the twentyfirst century now pose a challenge to the social reality that was engineered to fit a very narrow construct. Apfel-Marglin (1996) summarises the process cogently thus:

“ The process of commodification necessitates the extraction of the commodity-in-the-making from the context in which it was embedded as well

⁴ In this context, Nepal which was never formally colonised presents an interesting example of colonial attitudes brought to bear upon Nepal before and after colonisation elsewhere.

as its transformation into a quantifiable entity so that it can become available to be bought and sold in the market economy”

This is vividly brought out from the experience of nineteenth century experience of feudal Nepal documented by the Magasaysay award winning scholar, Mahesh Regmi (Regmi, 1978; 1988;1992) who had to eke out a living as a translator for the American Embassy in Kathmandu for most of his working life spanning the twentieth century due to the paucity of knowledge creating processes in which he could usefully participate and contribute. According to Regmi, one may view all phenomena, including history, from the perspective of Subjects or the objects with equal validity - an observation consistent with the subaltern perspective in works like Apfel Marglin and Stephen Marglin’s *Decolonising Knowledge* (Apfel-Marglin, 1996) and Guha’s *Subaltern studies* (Guha, 1989) .

The objectivity of an unbiased observation or analysis or interpretation can be judged in universalist terms in what Thomas Nagel calls ‘the view from nowhere’ (Nagel, 1989) but even a view from nowhere has a location, a minimum of one inquiring mind and two inquiry frames for reasons discussed earlier. Robotisation and artificial intelligence applications have made great progress but have not yet enabled the relaxing of this condition because no machine has yet passed the Turing test (that would make distinguishing between a human and an intelligent machine impossible) despite the reigning world chess champion’s defeat by IBM programmed ‘Deep Blue’ Computer. All truth is then contingent truth - a positional perspective, just as the Sun and moon appear to us as being of about the same size to all persons with standard eyesight or the faith that humanity has

in the eternal nature of the pole star just because there is a pole star during the current glacial cycle. Such fallacies would persist in the common perception unless the span of time or distance between the observer, the observed and the set of observables over the span of the earth's chronology are brought into consideration to gain some perspective from somewhere.

In situations like what Nepal has gone through for all of its existence as a nation since 1768, a period coinciding with the emergence and dominance of Western knowledge traditions, the only basis for legitimate authority of decision-making by persons - as individuals, households and communities- is the authority they enjoy over their life in the presence of uncertainty, whereby customs, traditions, conventions, customary laws constitute an important ingredient impacting inquiry frames (Mathur, 1993). By definition, when we can measure uncertainty, we call it risk because we can then assign probabilities to different outcomes. Different ways of coping with uncertainties call for different ways of risk calculus. This is the core of the problem. For example, if Nepali environmental concerns are to be addressed in this decade through progressive conservation as demanded by environmental lobby groups, society would have to be preferentially ordered above ecology. If eco-tourism is to be promoted though what is called "wilderness thinking" to satisfy nature lovers and appease foreign-exchange earning constituents of the Nepali economy, we would have to implicitly invite hostility to subsistence agriculture and pastoral farming. So there may be a trade-off between the two approaches. However, if both are to be simultaneously pursued, ecology requires to be embedded in society to transcend both perspectives (Guha, 1996). This is impossible without space for competing knowledge traditions. Is there any one and only one way to

achieve this transcendence ? Would any of the locally feasible ways be generalisable to Asia or universalisable worldwide for similar dilemmas elsewhere ? We cannot know until plurality and diversity are at a premium in our ways of thinking and acting and there is experience to draw upon. Such experience may never arise if the superiority of one set of methods is *a priori* assumed as a matter of procedure.

This produces a schism in which there is an unresolvable tension between social engineering based on the presumption of an ontological divide between subject and object versus social engineering based on claims to resources embedded in practice where tacit knowledge is not only greater in magnitude but also more important. Esteva (1983) cites the problems of rural Mexico to argue that a dialogue between these two modes is impossible because of the inherent power dimension. Esteva's insight is true for a lot of countries, including Nepal. Inferences drawn from the specific references to the cultural and traditional heritage of the only Hindu Kingdom in the world, the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal are likely to have relevance to other countries too.

There is a multitude of contexts of intertwining between the two processes of social engineering cited above. If we can understand how knowledge traditions are valued or marginalised in local and global space we would also understand in some measure, Pierre Turquet's notion of the politics of relatedness. Nepal is a curious microcosmic reflection of macrocosmic geopolitical processes operating elsewhere too. The same could be hypothesised and explored with reference to any ancient civilization that has remained alive as a society in our times like Egypt or Peru or China or India where

abundance of traditional knowledge persists without being placed in boxes or contained in formal frames. However, I have chosen to focus on Nepal because Nepal enables us gain unique insights into the general problematique due to:

- (a) long isolation from transport and communications with the wheel not used until the twentieth century, marked by the absence of motorable roads and railroads in or out of the country) .
- (b) low levels of literacy and education for all but the elite, reinforced by the role of the State, as an instrument for suppressing threshold levels of awareness that could challenge the system until the 1990s, with concentration of all archival knowledge (in expressed and tacit forms) under the control of the royal family.
- (c) avoidance of *de jure* colonisation without being free from the persistence of *de facto* subordination by countries from far and near who use Nepal as a nursery and window for all kinds of experimentations in the name of modernisation in a nascent democracy.
- (d) the emergence of democracy in the 1990s with openness to development assistance from everywhere which enables us study the impact of global forces on a pristinely preserved populace.

The knower of an object (the Subject or *vishayi*) and the object (*vishaya*) are in their very essence distinct from one another and one cannot take the place of the other. The social work terminology of “animation” with vocational

categories profiled as “animators” is testimony to the non-living or inanimate nature of personhood without dignity before authority “to be human” is experienced. The external world and one’s own mind and thoughts are objective, if Self is the only subject. The discerning mind or ego is the Subject, when non-ego is the object. Whatever is conceived as the object cannot be the Subject. The attributes of a man and his environment or phenomenal self can never be his ego. What we call consciousness is determined by time, space, body, mind, memory, senses and much more. When particular persons differ from others, the difference lies in their environments, their bodies, senses, identities in relating to groups, characters, frames of inquiry and not in their human essence. This raises two questions: Why are inquiring minds conventionally regarded as embedded within finite sets of inquiry frames ? And, how may we engage with the infinity of inquiry frames, which are both resource and constraint to inquiring minds ?

Before analysing this further, it is noteworthy that the above issues tend to be obscured from scrutiny and side-stepped in three main ways:

- (a) by appeal to scientific universalism, popularly captured in clichés about globalisation as a desired good or as an inevitable outcome which sets a frame of its own within which all inquiring frames and inquiring minds are encouraged to locate to establish bonafides. This bias to include and be included obscures differences as non-existent and works against the possibility to understand differences and creatively manage differences on different dimensions.

- (b) by inertia of cultural relativism that marginalises or rejects any idea that doesn't fit dominant inquiry frames to limit its relevance or validity to a specific group or cultural tradition with "culture" as the mysterious black-box. This bias to exclude is a convenient escape, a primitive form of first level defensive behaviour that can be characterised as denial.
- (c) by reinforcement of incentive structures that devalue objects and methods of inquiry that may produce noise or otherwise disturb the power structure of inter-group relations away from *status quo* alignments. Such reinforcements produce the effect that what is affirmed and included under (a) above or what is rejected and excluded under (b) above remains outside the scope of any inquiry leaving large amounts of tacit knowledge hidden or in blind spots where such knowledge cannot be easily found.

All important human work in the arts and in science consists of formulating or fashioning in one's head a hypothetical situation which can overlap the intervening space and be reformed in the head of someone else. To do so assumes the capacity to narrate and to relate to human experience or interpretations thereof outside one's cognitive frame and to create spaces and frames that record such experiences as they occur, to share in them, to analyse them and to seek to understand them through interpretations. Attempts at this in the manner of anthropologists studying exotic tribes in far-off places are reminiscent of hidden agendas, assumed racial hierarchies and centre-periphery dynamics which further raise many questions. For these, and other reasons, the very distinction between sociology and social

anthropology was called into question by the legendary sociologist, M.N. Srinivas.

Situated between China and India, Nepal is a confluence of many social science research traditions and reveals a range of recursive patterns as part of its social, intellectual and political fabric. The Kot Massacre of 1846 in which almost all the nobility were murdered has echoes in the palace massacre of 2001, albeit with one difference. Whereas, the previous massacre tightened the grip of feudal elites through Rana rule, the latest massacre which occurred after constitutional democracy under a monarch had been established in 1990 merely weakened the role of State in coping with Maoist insurgents. Whereas the former limited the study of science, including social science through administrative fiat, the latter produced the same effect through strains on finances and limited national capacities for development initiatives.

Nepal remained a closed and insulated poor and backward agrarian society, impervious to the advance of science and technology well into the second half of the twentieth century. There was only one school in 1900 and the first college, Trichandra College was started only in 1918. The learning traditions by which inter-generational continuity was ensured were largely oral, passed on from parents to children, gurus to shishyas except for the elite who benefitted also from supplementary doses of school education, and higher education abroad. Community based institutions like local panchayats, anchal sabhas, peasants' organisations, women's organisations, labour associations, youth organisations etc were the only collective fora where codified knowledge as information could be stored and passed on.

Only a miniscule of elite families close to the royalty and the ranas had any property or wealth that could be augmented, traded or invested and the State did not create any public institutions for higher learning or scientific endeavour until after 1959 with the establishment of Tribhuvan University. Being a land-locked country with severely circumscribed transit rights, until the advent of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), the country was economically dependent on India and China and multilateral and bilateral aid.

For the entire period of Nepal's autonomous existence since 1768 when Prithvi Narayan Shah consolidated all the various principalities into one country livelihood opportunities beyond being agricultural labour were limited mainly to the export of Gurkha troops as cannon-fodder to the British Army, employment as servants or palace guards, and some semi-skilled and unskilled dependent labour services like sherpas, coolies, menial services, and construction work. This proved a major constraint to the emergence or sustainability of intellectual scholarship. Nor did the role of State facilitate an intellectual climate that might enable bright young Nepali to pursue science with selection based on meritorious scholastic achievement and aptitude. About 70 % of the economy remains outside the scope of monetisation and about 45 % of the potential labour time available cannot be used even now. Tea, Jute, Cotton introduced from India are the only cash crops and open cast mining for copper, iron, gold and sulphur, the mainstay of mining. Manufacturing contributes only 8 % to national income - with half of it coming from cottage industries.

Hachhethu (2002) notes that “education was virtually prohibited except for members of the ruling family and other privileged groups” until the end of the Rana regime in 1951 when intervention by India at the request of the ruling monarch, King Tribhuvan restored him to the throne ⁵. There were very few social scientists in Nepal before 1951 but there were some⁶.

All private and government colleges in the post-1951 period were affiliated to Patna University in India and by following that University’s curriculum did not teach or research Nepali history, economy, society at all. The situation was gradually corrected only after the establishment of Tribhuvan University in 1959. At this time, the total number of books and articles written on Nepal was about 1300. By the 1970s four social science research centres were established at Tribhuvan University⁷.

Highly qualified Nepali scholars were in short supply even when demand for their scholarship belatedly arose after 1970 because government jobs and INGO report writing have been more lucrative. Political Science and Sociology/Anthropology attracted many foreign scholars who brought their inquiry frames with them and returned abroad to publish abroad. Most of that work is still not available in Nepal’s libraries and never led to any follow-up or collaborative work to develop inquiry frames. The exceptions

⁵ A similar watershed timemarker arose in 1990 when India-at the request of the political leadership of Nepal (Koirala, Bhattarai et al) used the power over renewal of its trade and transit treaties with Nepal to persuade King Birendra to introduce democracy in the Country.

⁶ These included Mahesh Regmi, Yogi Narahari Nath, Babu Ram Acharya, Dhana Bajra Bajracharya, Surya Bikram Gyanwali, Naya Raja Panta, Ambika Prasad Upadhyaya, Shanakar Man Rajbanshi, Hemraj Sakya, Surya Bikram Gyanwale (among Nepali social scientists), Gulab Singh (known in the West as Leo Rose), William Kirkpatrick, Francis Hamilton, Hector Oldfield, Perceval Landon, Hari Prashad Shastri, Bhagwan Lal Indraj, K.P. Jaiswal (among the foreigners).

⁷ These included Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology (RECAST) and Research Centre for Educational Innovation (CERID) to the neglect of the *Itihas Sanshodhan Mandal that had been*

were Nepali scholars like Mahesh Regmi, Rishikesh Saha and Lok Raj Baral who lived in Nepal and published in Nepal. However, the total output of the five universities (together with their affiliated campuses, about 190 in number by Year 2002) did not lead to anything even remotely resembling a nascent social science tradition⁸. Foreign Universities continue to produce more Nepali Ph.Ds than all the Universities in Nepal put together. Almost all of the social science output of Nepal is now INGO-grant led report writing for the use of INGO missions and UN and its related organs, much of which is never published since it is essentially directed to support livelihoods of foreigners engaged in the aid business which, from present indications, is endless. The distinction between capacity building INGOS like SIDA, DANIDA, IDRC, USAID, advocacy INGOS like GTZ, FES, FNS, SNV, bilateral and multilateral consultancy projects initiated from abroad under UNIDO or World Bank initiatives like GDN and SANEI, ADB, university research centres funded by the Ford Foundation, professional associations like POLSAN and NEA and action-research based aid organisations like OXFAM and ACTIONAID has blurred.

Hachhetthu (2002) has counted that there are less than 80 post-doctoral scholars engaged in social science research in Nepal. This, in a country of about 26 million people is a drop in the ocean. Of these 80 scholars or so, only 28 visited the central library of Tribhuvan University at least once in the whole month of September 2001. This could be due to lack of books and

functioning since the 1950s on research and documentation of traditional knowledge in sanskrit and Newari.

⁸ *The collapse of generalisable social science is also noticeable in neighbouring India where scholars based in India are no longer able to publish much in international refereed journals. In economic sciences, only 6 of 2756 articles published in major international economic journals between 1990 and 1999 were written by scholars in India in contrast to 60 during the period 1950-70 (Chatterjee(2002).*

journals that scholars want to refer or yet another proof of the state of social science research. When we look at student enrolment at the Kirtipur campus of Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu between 1999 and 2001, the post-graduate enrolment of students has registered a decline in Economics and History, stagnation in sociology/anthropology and the only subject where enrolment increased is political science. Education has become vocationalised and students are migrating to law, medicine and engineering, away from the social and economic sciences. The class attendance at the University is less than 20 % because it is more lucrative to work as a driver, clerk or general helper for the INGOS. Nepal's University Grants Commission (UGC) supports social science research to the tune of about NC 2.5 million (about USD 80,000) for 40 scholars annually which is peanuts compared to the INGO money chasing scholars in the economy.

The present state as well as the future of social science research in Nepal is bleak. In the absence of any significant social science research, it is difficult to speculatively examine what might happen if and when local knowledge sprouts but it is possible to see some of the obvious areas where new knowledge could emerge which may then have to be further scrutinised for generalisability. The most significant social science process in Nepal at this time viz. the crowding out of social science knowledge is itself worthy of study and conclusions of such a study could then be compared with the experience of other poor, backward, land-locked countries in terms of what choices made in engaging with external economic relations bring to such countries but such a study hasn't been done . With the state of our present knowledge, it would be counter-productive for Nepal to reject knowledge of the West in the guise of preserving tradition and rejecting modernism.

There are two levels at which the interaction between inquiring minds and inquiry frames in Nepal may yet be undertaken. First, let's review the points of contact of latent unemerged tacit local knowledge in Nepal. Second, attention to images which the modern communication revolution enables Nepal to send and receive which are not only iconic in nature but also represent the illusions of certitude which could act as a barrier to the investments and development of social science in a country. Nepalis engaged in traditional agriculture including hill farming have also harvested traditional knowledge over the years that enables them grow food. The area is rich in flora and fauna. Knowledge of child-rearing, medicinal herbs, weeds, cropping patterns, natural forestry, apiary and cottage industries have not been crowded out in rural Nepal. The guru-chela tradition has been the dominant learning transmission and knowledge creation tradition in Nepal in the absence of other formalised institutions and such traditions are not to be discounted without examination (Neki, 1973). Might there be the seeds of tacit knowledge that can be made articulable to search for other knowledge? What is wrong in reinforcing oral traditions if these be the only vehicles of knowledge? After all, artefacts like parchments, paper, floppy diskettes of the present and monuments and materials used by many past civilizations are more easily destroyed by nature than human transmissions in the oral tradition which enable the vedas to be chanted today just as they were thousands of years ago. The imposition of a system of knowledge with structures based on an objectivist stance upon people whose main way of learning is process-based way of life before they have a chance to acquire resources to invest in old and new ways of knowledge creation is highly questionable. New modes of knowing are more

acceptable if they don't demand replacement of one set of traditions by another (Toulmin, 1990). Knowledge, hierarchically held, can hardly be expected to be egalitarian in aspiration especially when it does not take into account the core values of that society and we would do well to recall that *"civil society is a historical and not a universal category of human existence"* (Beteille, 2000).

Change occurs through internalisation of substantive and procedural matters to absorb and to shape pictures-in-the-mind. This is what brings me to the multi-media explosion that influences inquiring minds as well as inquiry frames. In our times, the audio-visual media of television channels sponsored by advertisers and subsidised by governments offers one of the most powerful vehicles of opinion formation. What kind of messages are being produced in Nepal and of Nepal, by whom and for whom.?

A British example may make this point clearer. In August 1994, UK's Channel Four Television's "Independent Film and Video Department" announced that it would make a major documentary series "to investigate human rights and economic development to assess the human cost of the unprecedented economic growth " (Gutch, 1994). Titled "Secret Asia", this documentary series specifically aimed to help voices campaigning against Asian governments find a wider audience "by promoting banned footage or revelation of a previously hidden aspect of Asian Society using the talents of an Asian director, writer or journalist". It drew attention to issues such as China's critical treatment of Chris Patten (though not on Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's allegations against George Soros). It depicted floggings in Singapore (turning a blind eye to similar floggings in the British Isle of

Man) , an indication of how independently this department of Channel Four functioned. Films this endeavour funded included one based on Filipino sex workers in Japan titled “The Sex Warriors and the Samurais” drawing attention to kinky Japanese. This was produced by a Brit of Indian extraction Parminder Vir and directed by a Filipino Nick Deocampo, lending that much sought straw of legitimacy that portrayal of Asian phenomena was taking place through Asian eyes.

Examples of how opinions and pictures-in-the-mind are formed from consumer marketing and the film media are important because these are more powerful message channels than scholarship piped through scholarly journals read by a few scholars. This is not to underestimate hidden agendas, assumed racial hierarchies and centre-periphery dynamics also present in a lot of reported scientific and scholarly endeavours. For centuries, and particularly since the seventeenth century, social scientists in the West have been trying to understand and explain life and society in far-off places. This happened for economic reasons, for satisfying curiosity, and for salvation of the heathen. The circumstances of the industrial revolution required colonial conquests, slavery and bonded labour to promote cheap industrialisation. In countries like Nepal where subjugation was substituted for colonisation, knowledge traditions did not escape this imprint of colonisation. What would happen if subjugated populations of Africa and Asia were to reflect upon European and American customs, traditions and attitudes towards life, conceptions of life, politics etc. ? At least one Bengali novelist tried to grapple with the theme of reverse colonisation fantasising what would have happened had Indians colonised Britain instead of the other way around. In a similar vein, an African Professor from Mali, Manthia Diawar put French

anthropologist Jean Rouch under the lens reversing Rouch's approach to studying Africa by applying it to Rouch himself in his own Parisian environment in a classic film documentary "Rouch in Reverse". The recursive nature of the other as a mirror is a recurring feature in human groups united by identities of faith, religion, culture, ethnicity or territorial national affinity when they view each other to understand, establish, hold on to or deconstruct some picture of a global social order.

Convergence in knowledge frames calls for synthesis based on recognition of divergence as legitimate. Institutions - no matter where - are arrangements with distinct identities and traditions. Listening and learning from the divergence could cross-fertilise flows of knowledge. Unless there be an explicit aim to create new knowledge originating from different knowledge traditions in many different parts of the world, the focus is likely to remain limited to finding information that would facilitate participation in a narrow set of inquiry frames of the West. This could be a tragedy of epic proportions but it is beyond the scope of this paper to inquire into its intended and unintended consequences.

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